

# LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

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**Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, and Housing**  
**Testimony of Senator Lena C Taylor**  
**Senate Bill 390 – Expansion of the Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission**  
**Tuesday, January 22nd, 2008**

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Honorable Senators,

Thank you for hearing testimony today on Senate Bill 390 which will expand the Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission. As the author of this bill, I am pleased to offer you insight on this bill and the issue for Milwaukee.

In 2006, a comprehensive study into the Fire and Police Commission indicated that it did not have the adequate resources to do its job effectively. In examining this issue since then, I have spoke with members of the commission, and with many members of the community. I ultimately examined what the state can do in its statutory language to assist the commission.

The result is Senate Bill 390. It has four basic components:

1. The first is the expansion of the body. Currently the board has 5 commissioners. This bill increases the board to 7 or 9 members at the discretion of the mayor of Milwaukee.
2. The second is the authority for panels of three members to hear cases. This will allow either two or three cases, depending on the size of the overall commission, to be heard concurrently. This will help speed the hearing of cases which is a major concern for many of the citizens with grievances pending before the commission
3. Thirdly, SB 390 will legislate that appeals of police officers and firefighters will be heard within 60 and 120 days of the appeal being noticed. This will help speed appeals and not have the process drug out for years.
4. Finally, the bill will allow adjournments of hearing “for cause” only. This is the standard used by circuit courts for adjournment and will continue to expedite the work of the Fire and Police Commission.

SB 390 represents a positive change that the state can enact to help the public and the Fire and Police Commission do its job in a more effective manner. The City of Milwaukee has endorsed these changes in their legislative agenda.

I encourage you to support this bill and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. I am confident that the testimony you hear today will make a compelling argument for support of SB 390.

Thank you.



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**Senate Bill 390:**

**Proposal to Change the Composition of the City of Milwaukee's Fire & Police Commission**

In 2006, Milwaukee's Fire and Police Commission hired the Police Assessment Resource Center (PARC) to evaluate the Commission and make recommendations for improvement. The evaluation, "Promoting Police Accountability in Milwaukee: Strengthening the Fire and Police Commission" was released in June of 2006. The report acknowledged the difficulty in quickly processing the sheer volume of disciplinary cases before it and made recommendations to improve the process. Additionally, it acknowledged significant public dissatisfaction over the length of time it takes to resolve citizen complaints and disciplinary appeals.

To address this issue, one of PARC's recommendations was to expand the Commission to 7 appointees, provided that the Commission was still able to hear and decide upon disciplinary appeals in panels of three members. The Commissioners would continue to serve staggered five-year terms to "foster the right balance of experience and fresh perspectives." They would also continue to be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council. Implementing this change requires action by the Wisconsin State Legislature.

As pointed out by PARC, expanding the Commission's membership would allow broader representation and a broader base of skills. It would also improve the ability of the Commission to have a quorum at any given meeting. Lastly, it would distribute the large workload over a greater number of people, thereby making the appointment more attractive to candidates under consideration.

Traditionally, police officer and firefighter disciplinary trials have been scheduled on a weekly basis given challenges associated with the availability of Commissioners and pre-trial and post-trial documentation requirements. Expanded membership using the model of panels of 3 Commissioners to hear and decide disciplinary appeals would allow an increased number of trials to be scheduled on a regular basis. This would help eliminate the backlog of trials and move disciplined officers off the city payroll in a more timely fashion, thereby saving Milwaukee taxpayers money.

Proposal: Amend s. 62.50 (1) to increase the board of fire and police commissioners to 7 appointees. Add language authorizing panels of three board members to hear and decide upon disciplinary appeals.

For more information, please contact:

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